

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0625

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT ET

SUBJECT: RETURN TO STATUS QUO ANTE IN ERITREA

1. SUMMARY: A REVIEW OF EVENTS IN ERITREA FROM JULY 1 THROUGH THE FIRST WEEK IN AUGUST REVEALS A PATTERN OF RAPIDLY SHIFTING POSITIONS AMONG THE THREE PRINCIPAL PARTIES IN THE ERITREAN STRUGGLE. THE INSURGENTS BEGAN THE PERIOD WITH A SHARPLY INCREASED ASSASSINATION CAMPAIGN, THEN SUSPENDED ALL ACTIVITY IN THE ASMARA AREA, ONLY TO END THE PERIOD WITH A GRADUAL RESUMPTION OF THEIR TERRORISTIC CAMPAIGN. THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY FORCES MOVED FROM A TRADITIONAL ROLE OF REACTING TO REBEL INITIATIVES, TO ALTERNATE FLASHES OF TENSION AND LAPSES OF LASSITUDE, AND FINALLY AN APPEARANCE OF COOPERATION WITH CENTRAL AUTHORITY AND NORMALITY. THE DIRG, WHOSE FOCUS ON ERITREA WAS LARGELY CURSORY UNTIL BG
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GETACHEW CAME BEFORE THEM JULY 9 WITH DEMANDS FOR THEIR RESIGNATION AND FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT IN ERITREA, DISPOSED OF GETACHEW AND HIS SUPPORTERS AND DEVOTED THE BULK OF THEIR ATTENTION TO WUASHING TWO OVERT EFFORTS (DEBRE ZEIT, JULY 16, AND ASSAB,

JULY 24) AGAINST THEM AND SUBDUING UNREST IN THE MILITARY ELSEWHERE. BY HARSH AND DECISIVE REACTION TO PITIFULLY INEPT ATTEMPTS BY MILITARY DISSIDENTS, THE DIRG WAS ABLE TO "TOUGH OUT" THE TROUBLED TIME AND RE-IMPOSE ITS CONTROL OVER THE MILITARY FORCES IN ERITREA. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PERIOD FROM JULY 1 TO AUGUST 6 WITNESSED AN ODD SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WHICH NOW APPEAR TO HAVE BROUGHT THE LOCAL SITUATION FULL CIRCLE WHILE INVOLVING IN THESE EVENTS IN ALTERNATING MEASURE, THE INSURGENTS, THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY, AND THE DIRG. WE HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY A PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR THAT ACCOUNTS FOR THE OBSERVED PHENOMINA. ALLOWING FOR SIGNIFICANT GAPS IN OUR KNOWLEDGE, WE BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS IS REASONABLY VALID.

3. EARLY JULY WAS MARKED BY SIX ASSASSINATIONS IN ASMARA AND A SIZEABLE SKIRMISH ON THE DECAMERE ROAD TO WHICH THE EPMG FORCES REACTED IN THEIR TRADITIONAL PATTERN. THIS LEVEL OF INSURGENT ACTIVITY WAS SOMEWHAT HIGHER THAN THAT OF THE PRECEEDING SIX MONTHS.

4. THE DEATH OF BG GETACHEW, CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR OF ERITREA, WAS THE WATERSHED EVENT OF THIS FIVE-WEEK PERIOD. HE WAS ELIMINATED BY THE DIRG APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF HIS DEMAND THAT THE DIRG RESIGN AND THAT A PEACEFUL SOLUTION BE FOUND FOR THE ERITREAN SITUATION. THESE DEMANDS, WHICH REFLECTED THE POSITION OF A SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF THE ETHIOPIAN FORCES IN ERITREA, PARTICULARLY THE OFFICERS, UNDOUBTEDLY BECAME KNOWN TO THE INSURGENTS AS WELL AS TO OTHER DISSATISFIED UNITS OF THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY. THE DIRG'S ATTENTION BECAME RIVETED ON ASMARA; THEY ENGINEERED THE CLOSURE OF RADIO ASMARA, RECALLED AND EXECUTED TWO PROMINENT OFFICERS, AND HAD SEVERAL KNOWN DISSIDENT OFFICERS ARRESTED. WHILE DIRG OPERATIVES IN ASMARA ACTED WITH REMARKABLE AUDACITY IN THE FACE OF THE UNREST STILL SEETHING AMONG THE MILITARY, SENIOR ETHIOPIAN OFFICERS IN ASMARA FOUND THEMSELVES IN A VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE POSITION. WHILE RESENTFUL OF THE DIRG'S SIMMARY DISPOSAL OF GETACHEW, THEY WERE PROPERLY CHASTENED BY THE CONFIDENTIAL

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EXAMPLE. BEING UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE LOYALTIES OF THEIR TROOPS AND BEING INCAPABLE OF CONTROLLING THE MORE VOLATILE UNITS, I.E., THE AIRBORNE, THEIR ONLY POSSIBLE REACTION WAS TO REMAIN ALERT AND BOB ON THE SURFACE OF THE TURBULENCE.

5. THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE SITUATION WITHIN THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY FOLLOWING GETACHEW'S DEATH IS BELIEVED TO BE SURPRISINGLY ACCURATE. THEY WERE AWARE OF GETACHEW'S DEATH WITHIN 24 HOURS AND REALIZED THAT IT SIGNALLED A MAJOR FISSURE IN THE ADDIS LEADERSHIP. THEY ARE CERTAIN TO HAVE BECOME AWARE OF GETACHEW'S DEMANDS, AND ALTHOUGH THE VAGUE "PEACEFUL SOLUTION" HELD LITTLE PROMISE FOR THEM, THE CONCEPT OF NEGOTIATING A SETTLEMENT, THE TERMS OF WHICH WOULD BE STRONGLY INFL-

UENCED BY DISILLUSIONED ETHIOPIAN SOLDIERS WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN ERITREA, MUST HAVE APPEARED FAIRLY ATTRACTIVE.8THE INSURGENT BELIEF THAT THERE WAS A CLEAR BENEFIT TO THEM IN PERMITTING THE MILITARY DISSIDENCE TO RUN ITS COURSE UNHINDERED APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE KEY FACTOR IN THE 23-DAY CESSATION OF THEIR ASSASSINATION CAMPAIGN IN ASMARA. THEY OBVIOUSLY WANTED TO AVOID BECOMING THE FOCUS OF THE MILITARY'S HOSTILITY DURING THIS PERIOD. WE ARE ALSO AWARE THAT DURING THIS PERIOD SERIOUS EFFORTS WERE BEING MADE TO UNIFY THE ELF AND THE PLF. SUCH EFFORTS IN THE PAST, WHILE HAVING SOME IMPACT ON THE LEVEL OF OPERATIONS IN THE FIELD, HAVE HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON LOW-LEVEL, YET PERSISTENT, INSURGENT ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND ASMARA.

6. THE FIRST WEEK IN AUGUST SAW A RETURN TO A REBEL CAMPAIGN OF ASSASSINATION WHICH WOULD INDICATE A DEFINITE CHANGE IN PERCEPTION BY THE INSURGENT LEADERS. TO DATE THIS RENEWED CAMPAIGN HAS INCLUDED: THE ASSASSINATION ON AUG. 2 OF AN ASMARA KEBELE LEADER KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN COOPERATIVE WITH THE EPMG AUTHORITIES; THE ASSASSINATION ON AUG. 5 OF A TRUCK DRIVER WHO ALLEGEDLY INFORMED ON HIS FELLOW EMPLOYEES AFTER THE HIJACKING BY REBELS OF A TRUCKLOAD OF SHOES ON AUG. 3, AND A FIREFIGHT IN DOWNTOWN ASMARA AT 1500 HOURS AUG. 5 APPARENTLY INITIATED BY THE REBELS AND RESULTING IN THREE DEATHS. THERE ARE TWO MUTUALLY-SUPPORTIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR THIS CHANGE OF PERCEPTION. THE MORE OBVIOUS IS THE ARRIVAL IN ASMARA ON AUGUST 1, CLEARLY VIEWED BY INSURGENTS AS THE IMPOSITION OF "THE DIRG'S MAN" IN ASMARA, AND THE FINAL NAIL IN THE DISSIDENT'S COFFIN. THE OTHER EXPLANATION IS THAT AFTER THREE WEEKS OF VACILLATION AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES, THE

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ETHIOPIAN MILITARY IN ASMARA APPEARED TO INSURGENTS NEVER TO BE ABLE TO CARRY INTO POSITIVE ACTION THEIR DISSATISFACTION. IN EITHER EVENT IT HAS APPARENTLY NOW BEEN DETERMINED BY THE INSURGENTS THAT THERE IS NO MERIT IN AWAITING FURTHER TO ASSESS THE ATTITUDES AND POLICIES OF THE NEWLY-APPOINTED CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, COL. FIKRU, AS HIS RECENT CONFIRMATION BY THE DIRG PLACES HIM SQUARELY IN THE OPPOSING CAMP.

7. THIS CYCLICAL PATTERN OF EVENTS APPEARS, THEREFORE, TO HAVE BROUGHT THE SITUATION IN ERITREA BACK TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. THE INSURGENTS ARE ONCE AGAIN CLEARLY IN EVIDENCE, PURSUING THEIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST THEIR "ENEMIES" IN ASMARA. FURTHER THEY ARE CURRENTLY THREATENING TO PREVENT A SOUTHBOUND CONVOY, NOW FORMING IN ASMARA, FROM LEAVING ERITREA UNHINDERED. FOR THEIR PART, THE MILITARY APPEAR ON THE SURFACE TO HAVE RESOLVED THEIR CONFLICTS AND ARE FUNCTIONING NORMALLY. AS A MEASURE OF THE RETURN TO NORMALITY, RADIO ASMARA, WHICH HAS BEEN OFF THE AIR SINCE JULY 12, BEGAN TRANSMITTING AGAIN ON AUGUST 5. THE DIRG IS NOW ABLE TO RELAX ITS FOCUS ON PROBLEMS WITHIN THE MILITARY IN ERITREA AND DEAL CALMLY WITH THAT SITUATION. IF A BELATED REPORT IS TRUE, THEY MAY BE WORKING THROUGH A 15-MEMBER ETHIOPIAN MILITARY GROUP FROM ERITREA WHICH WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN SENT TO ADDIS

THE WEEK AFTER GETACHEW'S DEATH. THIS GROUP, COMPRISED OF BOTH
OFFICERS AND NCO'S, IS REPORTEDLY STILL IN ADDIS DISCUSSING
GRIEVANCES WITH THE DIRG.
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